1:Heckewelder M-5 (ca. 1800)1819
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CHAPTER XXXIII.

INITIATION OF BOYS.

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I DO not know how to give a better name to a superstitious practice which is very common among the Indians, and, indeed, is universal among those nations that I have become acquainted with. By certain methods which I shall presently describe, they put the mind of a boy in a state of perturbation, so as to excite dreams and visions; by means of which they pretend that the boy receives instructions from certain spirits or unknown agents as to his conduct in life, that he is informed of his future destination and of the wonders he is to perform in his future career through the world.

When a boy is to be thus *initiated*, he is put under an alternate course of physic and fasting, either taking no food whatever, or swallowing the most powerful and nauseous medicines, and occasionally he is made to drink decoctions of an intoxicating nature, until his mind becomes sufficiently bewildered, so that he sees or fancies that he sees visions, and has extraordinary dreams, for which, of course, he has been prepared before hand. He will fancy himself flying through the air, walking under ground, stepping from one ridge or hill to the other across the valley beneath, fighting and conquering giants and monsters, and defeating whole hosts by his single arm. Then he has interviews with the Mannitto or with spirits, who inform him of what he was before he was born and what he will be after his death. His fate in this life is laid entirely open before him, the spirit tells him what is to be his future employment,

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whether he will be a valiant warrior, a mighty hunter, a doctor, a conjurer, or a prophet. There are even those who learn or pretend to learn in this way the time and manner of their death.

When a boy has been thus initiated, a name is given to him analogous to the visions that he has been, and to the destiny that is supposed to be prepared for him. The boy, imagining all that happened to him while under perturbation, to have been real, sets out in the world with lofty notions of himself, and animated with courage for the most desperate undertakings.

The belief in the truth of those visions is universal among the Indians. I have spoken with several of their old men, who had been highly distinguished for their valour, and asked them whether they ascribed their achievements to natural or supernatural causes, and they uniformly answered, that as they knew beforehand what they could do, they did it of course. When I carried my questions farther, and asked them how they knew what they could do? they never failed to refer to the dreams and visions which they had while under perturbation, in the manner I have above mentioned.

I always found it vain to attempt to undeceive them on this subject. They never were at a loss for examples to shew that the dreams they had had were not the work of a heated imagination, but that they came to them through the agency of a mannitto. They could always cite numerous instances of valiant men, who, in former times, in consequence of such dreams, had boldly attacked their enemy with nothing but the *Tumahican** in their hand, had not looked about to survey the number of their opponents, but had gone straight forward, striking all down before them; some, they said, in the French wars, had entered houses of the English filled with people, who, before they had time to look about, were all killed and laid in a heap. Such was the strength, the power and

* War-hatchet; from which we have made *tomahawk*.

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787 the courage conveyed to them in their supernatural dreams, and which nothing could resist.

787 If they stopped here in their relations, I might, perhaps, consider this practice of putting boys under per-
●881 turbation, as a kind of military school or exercise, intended to create in them a more than ordinary courage, and make them undaunted warriors. It certainly has this effect on some, who fancying themselves under the immediate protection of the celestial powers, despise all dangers, and really perform acts of astonishing bravery. But it must be observed, that all that are thus initiated are not designed for a military life, and that several learn by their dreams that they are to be physicians, sorcerers, or that their lives are to be devoted to some other *civil* employment. And it is astonishing what a number of superstitious notions are infused into the minds of the unsuspecting youth, by means of those dreams, which are useless, at least, for making good warriors or hunters. There are even some who by that means are taught to believe in the transmigration of souls.

787 I once took great pains to dissuade from these notions a very sensible Indian, much esteemed by all who knew him, even among the whites. All that I could say or urge was not able to convince him that at the time of his *initiation* (as I call it) his mind was in a state of temporary derangement. He declared that he had a clear recollection of the dreams and visions that had occurred to him at the time, and was sure that they came from the agency of celestial spirits. He asserted very strange things, of his own supernatural knowledge, which he had obtained not only at the time of his initiation, but at other times, even before he was born. He said he knew he had lived through two generations; that he had died twice and was born a third time, to live out the then present race, after which he was to die and never more to come to this country again. He well remembered what the women had predicted while he was yet in his

2;Newcomb E-4, 5 (1951-1952) 1956
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take baths in streams, even if the water was covered with ice.[37] Trowbridge said "they believe it of the utmost consequence to their children to subject them to hardship in their infancy and youth."[38] If children were orphaned "the maternal grandfather or mother is bound by custom to take the children under protection; but if they also be dead the children are adopted by such relatives or friends as may be inclined to take charge of them."[39] Children born out of wedlock were normally cared for by the mother, but the father might contribute to their support. No stigma attached to illegitimacy.[40]

Puberty: boys.— The vision quest of the young boy was the climax of the more formal aspects of the educational system and served to usher the boy over the threshold into adult life. When a boy was about ten years old,[41] or when his voice began to change (N.D.), he began what can best be called a series of ordeals:

> [A boy] is put under an alternate course of physic and fasting, either taking no food whatever, or swallowing the most powerful and nauseous medicines, and occasionally he is made to drink decoctions of an intoxicating nature, until his mind becomes sufficiently bewildered, so that he sees or fancies that he sees visions, and has extraordinary dreams, for which, of course, he has been prepared beforehand.[42]

Parents insulted their sons, N.D. added, telling them that they were no good and that they should go out and "die." Boys were shamed, ridiculed, insulted, and all but physically driven from the village. It was felt that a humbled, miserable boy had a better opportunity to induce the supernatural spirits to feel sorry for him, and so reveal themselves to him and provide him with a supernatural guardian. Boys inevitably went into a lonely exile filled with despair at their own inadequacy and in the desperate hope of obtaining a supernatural being's assistance in a hostile world. If the vision quest produced a guardian spirit, a boy was restored to the good graces of the community, acquired a good deal of self-confidence, and the course of his life was known. Future occupations, for instance, were decided by these visions, whether a boy was to be a warrior, shaman, or something else.[43] Not all boys, however, were successful in the vision quest. Women frequently had visions, although they were not consciously solicited.[44]

Puberty: girls.— When a girl menstruated for the first time she was secluded in a hut.[45] Zeisberger said of the Munsis:

> ...being the more strict and having more ceremonies in the observance of the custom than the Miamis. They build for such a girl, a separate hut, apart from the rest, where her mother or some old female acquaintance cares for her

[37] Penn, 1912, p. 231; Pastorius, 1912, p. 434; Trowbridge MS; J.T., N.D., O.A.
[38] Trowbridge MS.
[39] *Ibid.*
[40] *Ibid.*
[41] Harrington, 1913, p. 214.
[42] Heckewelder, 1881, p. 245.
[43] *Ibid.*, pp. 245-47. See Chap. IV for a discussion of the supernatural beings encountered in visions.
[44] Zeisberger, 1910, p. 132; N.D.
[45] Zeisberger, 1910, p. 77; Beatty, 1788, pp. 84-85; Loskiel, 1794, p. 58; N.D., O.A.

2:Newcomb E-4, 5 (1951-1952) 1956
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and guards her so that none may see her . . . she is also kept within the hut the whole of the menstrual period, with the blanket over her head. . . .[46]

De Vries also noted that these girls hid behind a garment "which they throw over their body drawing it over the head so that one can barely see their eyes."[47] The emphasis during menstruation was on uncleanliness and the necessity of isolation from society.[48] A girl could not touch her hair during her first isolation, food was eaten with a stick, and no meat was eaten.[49] In the last century, and perhaps earlier, a girl could not look in a mirror or talk to people (N.D.). At the end of the seclusion the girl's mother washed her hair, bathed her, and gave her new clothes. The idea was impressed upon the girl that she was now a woman and was henceforth to give up the toys and activities of childhood.[50] The same general restrictions applied to menstruating women.[51]

Little is known about premarital chastity in early historic times. Denton said, however: "Any maid before she is married doth lie with whom she please for money without any scandal, or the least aspersion to be cast upon her it being so customary, & their laws tolerating it."[52]

Marriage

After the boys had proved themselves to be adequate hunters and the girls had passed through their first seclusion, they were considered ready for marriage. This took place at about the age of seventeen or eighteen for boys and thirteen or fourteen for girls.[53] A girl showed her marriageability by wearing some sort of headpiece and by modestly covering the face with a portion of clothing when in public.[54] De Vries said further that girls "deck themselves with a quantity of zeewan [wampum] upon the body, head and neck; they then go and sit in some place, in company with some squaws, showing that they are up for a bargain."[55]

Several different ways of arranging marriages and several types of marriage ceremony have been recorded for the Delawares. Some of this variety was probably due to diffusion from other Indian cultures or from Euro-American civilization, but it was also possible that there were variations among the diverse Delawaran peoples. Four seventeenth-century sources stated that girls were courted with wampum.[56] In later times, at least, relatives or go-betweens arranged the marriage. According to Heckewelder the prospective bridegroom's mother usually initiated the negotiations; according to Trowbridge the father of the

[46] Zeisberger, 1910, p. 77.
[47] De Vries, 1909, p. 218; also Loskiel, 1794, p. 56.
[48] Zeisberger, 1910, p. 77; N.D., O.A.
[49] Penn, 1912, p. 232.
[50] N.D. See section on Mythology in Chap. IV for an account of a girl who refused to part with her dolls.
[51] Zeisberger, 1910, p. 77.
[52] Denton, 1845, p. 9.
[53] Penn, 1912, p. 231; Holm, 1834, pp. 127-28; Zeisberger, 1910, p. 75; Loskiel, 1794, p. 63.
[54] De Vries, 1909, p. 218; Pastorius, 1912, p. 434; Penn, 1912, p. 231.
[55] De Vries, 1909, p. 218.
[56] *Ibid.*; De Rasieres, 1909, p. 106; Denton, 1845, p. 9; Van der Donck, 1909, p. 302.

3:Zeisberger M-5 (1767-1780)1910
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regard them but little. They do not seem to be ashamed of their vices. For this reason, Indians themselves declare that their condition grows worse from year to year. As there is neither law nor legal penalty among them, they have nothing to fear, except that an injured one may avenge himself in the manner in which he has been injured. If one has seduced the wife of another, the offended party will seek to seduce the wife of the offender. He will keep his purpose a secret and not rest until he has obtained satisfaction, when he makes known to others what he has done, so that the original offender may hear of it.

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When, in a young female, the first menstrual discharge occurs, generally between the twelfth and sixteenth year, the Delawares generally separate such daughters from all companionship, the Monsies [Monseys] being more strict and having more ceremonies in the observance of the custom than the Miamis. They build for such a girl, separate hut, apart from the rest, where her mother or some old female acquaintance cares for her and guards her so that none may see her. Wherefore, she is also kept within the hut the whole of the menstrual period, with the blanket over her head. She is given little to eat, but regularly dosed with emetics. She is not allowed to do any work during the whole time, which generally lasts twelve days. At the end of the time, they bring her into her home, looking black, grimy and dishevelled, because she has been lying about in dust and ashes the whole time. Washed and dressed in new garments, she is allowed to be in the home, but required to wear a cap with a long shield, so that she can neither see any one readily, nor be seen. Such a covering she must wear for two months, at the end of which time she is informed that she may marry.

D [582] 292]

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The Shavanose [Shawanese] and Mingoes, however, who observe much the same custom, follow a different course in this matter. The young woman in question is allowed to remain in the house. She prepares food for those in the house, of the corn and fruits she has raised. Of such food she does not, however, herself partake, but goes to her hut, apart from the others, and there prepares and eats her food.

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Every month, during her menstrual period, a Delaware woman lives by herself in a separate hut, which is usually very

the care of the younger children. Although physical punishment was seldom resorted to, exhortation and explanation were commonly used. One mythical story which was evidently used as a threat was that of the great naked bear. This was a creature, larger than most bears and naked except for a white spot. The only way to kill it was to break its back as its heart was so small that an arrow would seldom find it. The last of the species was reputed to have been killed on the east side of the Hudson River, but before that time it was said that recalcitrant children were particularly likely to be its victims (Heckewelder, 1799, pp.260-62).

A boy's life was not burdened with many chores until he was twelve or older, his time being spent in fishing and playing (Penn, p.30; Pastorius, 1698, p.434; Zeisberger, 1870, p.86; Harrington, 1913, p.213). When he reached this age, it was desirable for him to have a vision and receive a guardian spirit (Lindstrom, p.207). To promote this, the parents mistreated him, fed him sparingly and finally drove him into the woods. It was felt that this would cause a spirit to feel sorry for the boy and present itself to him.9 The nature of the vision which a youth had was sometimes taken as a sign of his future profession, and training in such a case would start immediately to prepare the boy to become a shaman or warrior as the case might be (Harrington, 1913, pp. 214-15; Zeisberger, 1910, p.101). At about fifteen the boys began hunting and at this they had to become proficient before considering marriage.

The girls stayed with their mothers and began helping to hoe the ground, plant corn and carry burdens as soon as they were able (Penn, p.30; Zeisberger, 1870, p.87). At a girl's first menstruation she went to a small hut some distance from the house where she stayed at least seven days. Here meals were brought to her by her mother or an old woman-friend, but she could not be touched. She used a sharpened stick in eating to prevent the food from touching her hands. At the end of her seclusion, the girl washed herself and all her clothing and dishes before returning home. She was then considered ready for marriage (Penn, pp.33-4; Beatty, p.43; Brickell, p.49; Harrington, 1913, p.215).

Marriage

"When the Young Women are fit for Marriage, they wear something upon their Heads for an Advertisement, but so as their Faces are hardly to be seen..."(Penn, p.31). Other descriptions tell us that this covering was made of worked mats decorated with alternate rows of white and black wampum and was worn pulled down to the middle of the forehead (Smith, p.138; Zeisberger, 1910, p.77). Girls married between the ages of thirteen and fourteen; boys, at seventeen or eighteen (Penn, p.31). According to Zeisberger, the Delaware had the tradition that individuals must always marry outside the local group, but no seventeenth century writer has commented on this point (Zeisberger, 1910, p.78).

6:Harrington E-5 (1907-1910)1921
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Lenape

women in their periodic condition, etc. Old Lenape say that, as the children of the tribe are reared nowadays in the same way as the whites, they can no longer be *pi'lsu*ⁿ, and the Powers will speak to them no more. This is a sad matter, for it means the loss of their principal ancient ceremonies, at which only those blessed with a vision can take active part. The old people feel it keenly that there will be no one left to conduct the rites when the last of their generation has been laid away.

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INITIATION OF BOYS

Parents were especially anxious, of course, that their sons should have supernatural aid, hence, when a boy reached the age of about twelve years, they would frequently pretend to abuse him, and would drive him, fasting, out into the forest to shift as best he might, in the hope that some *mani'to* would take pity on the suffering child and grant him some power or blessing that would be his dependence through life.

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Sometimes a man who had several sons would take them out into the forest and build them a rude little tent, and here they would remain for days at a time. During the day the boys were not permitted to eat, but just before sunrise every morning each was given a medicine to make him vomit, after which a tiny piece of meat was given him, about the size of a man's little finger. Occasionally the boys became able to fast in this way for twelve days, at the end of which time, the Lenape say, some had received such power that they were able to rise into the air, or go down into the ground, or prophesy events a year or two ahead, with the magic aid of the supernatural being that had taken pity on them.

OTHER VISIONS

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It sometimes happened also that people received visions of power in natural sleep without fasting, or even when wide awake, while feeling melancholy and heartsick over the death of a loved one, or suffering other misfortune or trouble.

10: Speck E-4, 5 (ca. 1925) 1931
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Not only are wild animals pure in contrast with domestic brutes in the sense embraced by the term, but youths who have completed the puberty vigil and acquired their guardian spirit are also pi·'lai·t, "clean, uncontaminated, spiritually purified," as opposed to those who have not. For instance one of the signs denoting the transition from pre-adolescence in boys to the "purity of manhood" is in the voice. They say that the youth is expected to remain in solitude during his vigil until his voice has changed completely, by which time he is then pi·'lai·t. It will be noticed also that the term is applied to fire made by the pump-drill at the Big House ceremony, pi·'lai·t' ta'n·da', "clean fire," the unadulterated new fire made without matches or other unclean materials; the latter being cowa'n·akwi· ta'n·da', "white man's fire," or mat·a pi·'ltak, "not pure." The sacred character of pure fire is shown in its honorific synonym muχo"mson·a, "our grandfather," the source of healing.

Spiritual purity, however, is not conditioned by ethical conduct, but rather (like the Hebraic takor) through the observance of taboo regulations prescribed by ancient rulings.[1] Foremost among these are the restrictions placed upon the freedom of women in their catamenial periods, and the carrying out of dietary usages based upon the classification of animals as clean and unclean. Another evidence of the individual being spiritually pure is to have been blessed with a vision bestowed by a supernatural power. Such individuals are pi·'lsi· in a high degree. They are indeed the mainstays of the Big House ceremony. They are in blessed communion with the man·i't·u, bringing into the Big House their spiritual media, the controls under which their destinies are moulded. Again to be pi·'lai· is to have gone through all the native teachings. And to live with a guileless character, child-like, is sufficient to entitle a man or woman (irrespective of marriage or celibacy) to be referred to as pi·'lai·t lən'·o "pure, clean, man," or pi·'lsi·t xkwe", "pure, clean, woman," as a child is pi·'lsi·t mi·'mas. The above may serve to outline at least the Delaware concept of personal holiness and unholiness as it is expounded in the text.

BEING BLESSED WITH A VISION. THE PERFORMERS IN THE CEREMONY. The main active parts in the ceremony are performed by those who have been blessed with revelations by spiritual-forces, the man·i't·u. These are the pure men, and also in a minor rôle, the pure women. The word element aŋg'o[2] seems to be the generic designation for the condition of being blessed with a spiritual revelation through a vision. By this is meant the visitation from some man·i't·u coming at some period in the life of the individual who is spiritually deserving from the point of view of his reverence for spiritual forces for his observance of the arbitrary rulings of religious doctrine, and adherence to logically

[1] A taboo is denoted by the term kwul·a'gan, "something forbidden."